

groups, labor unions, business and military leaders, people with disabilities, school principals, civil rights leaders, and literacy advocates. Now is the time to empower the next generation and guarantee a better future for our Nation.

HONORING RON MILLER

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. RIGELL) for 5 minutes.

Mr. RIGELL. Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege for me to be here this morning and to share with you and our colleagues the story of an exceptional American, Ron Miller, who I am proud to say lives in Virginia's Second Congressional District, the district I have the privilege to serve and represent.

Ron is 46 years old. He had always planned to go back to school; but at age 33, his life was turned upside down. He was diagnosed with Lou Gehrig's disease, or ALS, a devastating neurodegenerative disease that progressively affects nerves in the brain and the spinal cord. It is a disease for which, at present, there is no cure.

Ron is paralyzed from the nose down; yet he used eye-gaze computer technology to complete his associate's degree in liberal arts, with honors, in a bold and courageous effort to bring attention to ALS.

They have a wonderful staff at the Lake Taylor transitional facility where Ron lives, and where the graduation ceremony took place; and I saw tears coming down several of the staff members' eyes as they watched Ron receive his degree. Actually, the president of Excelsior College made the effort to fly down to be with us that day.

I was deeply honored to be there and to have the privilege of sharing the commencement address, but it certainly wasn't my words that inspired everyone who was there. It was Ron's words that he shared through his computer.

He didn't talk about himself. He didn't talk about how difficult things are for him. He mainly thanked all of those in his life that made the degree possible. He talked about the importance of education and the importance of finding a cure for ALS.

I want to share just a small portion of what he shared that day. I watched his eyes as they guided the cursor on the screen to the "play" button. When he hit it with his eyes, it actually started the computer to speak. He put it this way:

I ask that you all bear with me as I stumble my way through this. At least I can blame the computer if I mispronounce anything.

That got a laugh there. He has got a great sense of humor.

He said:

Thank you for ensuring I started each class not as a disabled person, but as a differently abled person.

He thanked all the nurses and the nurses' aides there. He said:

You are my heroes. First of all, it takes a lot of work for me to look this good.

He has a great sense of humor.

He thanked his family and his friends for their love and support.

Speaking of life, he said:

It isn't always easy—but life never is. I just have a different set of challenges than most.

He left us with this quote by John Wooden:

Do not let what you cannot do interfere with what you can do.

Powerful words.

To me, Mr. Speaker, Ron's courage and his remarkable achievement represent the very best of the American spirit and the human spirit. It is a strong heart that chooses to be grateful for life's simple blessings, one that values the gift of friendship, one that embraces the pursuit of knowledge, and one that does not rest in a relentless pursuit to lessen human suffering, especially for those who will follow.

So I really count it as a high privilege to know Ron and to count him as a friend. He is fulfilling his mission to ensure that Americans are educated about the challenges that those with ALS face. He has also shown us what a person with ALS can accomplish.

He and many others who are heavily burdened with ALS, and their families, are calling attention to the need for improved access. We have a wonderful facility in Virginia Beach that is a tremendous asset for those who are afflicted with a disease that affects their physical mobility and that includes many of our wounded warriors.

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It is JT's Grommet Island. It is right there on Virginia Beach, really the first on the east coast that allows people that are mobility impaired to get down and experience the joy of being on the water and the sun and the sand and just being outside.

There is a lot more work to be done, and I am so proud of our friends, Bruce Thompson and others. His son, Josh, is afflicted with ALS, and he led the effort to build that facility that I just mentioned there. It is called JT's Grommet Island, and it is named in honor of his son, Josh, who is struggling with this, and his family is as well.

I just want to close my comments today with great respect for those who are struggling with this disease and to share with you something that Ron has said about his struggle. It is an outlook on life that I found profound and inspirational, and I posted it in my home where I see it every day. He said this: "I may have ALS, but ALS does not have me."

So, Mr. Speaker, may Ron's remarkable achievement and the spirit that he exhibits in his life inspire all of us to join him in this worthy fight to find a cure for ALS.

THE 50-YEAR WAR ON POVERTY

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentlewoman from California (Ms. SPEIER) for 5 minutes.

Ms. SPEIER. Mr. Speaker, I am here to speak about unemployment insurance and the extension of it to my Republican colleagues. But there is no one over here to listen, so maybe they will listen to some renowned Republicans talk about what is really important.

How about Newt Gingrich, who recently said, "I think every Republican should embrace the Pope's core critique that you do not want to live on a planet with billionaires and people who do not have any food?"

Or how about John Feehery, a Republican strategist who said, "What does the Republican Party actually believe in? What is its purpose? Is it just to have unbridled capitalism without any moral core?"

Mr. Speaker, this 50-year war on poverty has faced setbacks under the leadership of both parties, but the GOP-led House seems to be actively engaged in a war on the war on poverty. Congress' inaction has cut off 1.3 million people from unemployment insurance after Christmas and, unless renewed, will cut benefits for another 1.9 million who are eligible in 2014.

Some of my colleagues across the aisle have claimed that this is just politics, that unemployment insurance was "intended to be a temporary solution to a very temporary crisis." Well, here's a news flash. We have been in this crisis since 2008. This is not temporary. This is long-term and it is chronic, and it has been caused by the greed of billionaires of the likes that we have seen on Wall Street. This is a personal nightmare for many of the constituents of my colleagues across the aisle. Some of their constituents have written to my office because they think their Representative is blind to how they are struggling.

Now, Margaret Heffernan is a renowned speaker, and she talks about mindless blindness. And in many respects, that is what I think we are engaged in here, mindless blindness. So here are some of the stories of those impacted by the loss of unemployment insurance who live in districts of my Republican colleagues, because maybe they will hear me and think about who is being hurt by playing politics.

Payne Springs, Texas, resident Linda Mrosko shared her story with me on my congressional Facebook page. Linda was 60 years old when her legal secretary job was eliminated. With more than 40 years of work experience under her belt—this is not someone sitting on a couch at home—40 years of experience as a paralegal secretary, she believed unemployment insurance would protect her if she lost her job. Even while caring for her 80-year-old mother with breast cancer, Linda continued to look for work but got very few interviews. Her 91-year-old father then fell ill and died, but Linda continued to look for work, even while in